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# A D D R E S S ,

DELIVERED IN THE CHAPEL OF AMHERST COLLEGE,

August 24, 1834.

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BEFORE THE

SOCIETY OF INQUIRY.

AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST.

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BY ARTEMAS BOIES,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH, IN SOUTH HADLEY,

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AMHERST:

J. S. AND C. ADAMS, PRINTERS.

1834.

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## ADDRESS.

It was the remark of a shrewd writer, that that author does the most, who gives us the most knowledge, and takes from us the least time. I propose this evening, not indeed to accomplish this myself, but to direct your attention to a virtue—for I must call it so—which will do it. It is a rare property of the mind; yet, it is not more frequently natural, than acquired. I refer to *discretion*, which in young men, and at this day of excited feeling on almost every subject, is as necessary as it is invaluable. We cannot but be sensible, that there are faults in men, and in things which demand, and may have a remedy. There is a vast amount of talent, wealth, influence and piety, now embarked in the glorious enterprise of reforming the world. Genius, eloquence, learning, sanctified and unsanctified, are pouring their brilliant treasures upon the field of Christian benevolence; and certainly no age has witnessed warmer zeal, or more untiring effort in the Church, than the present age. Yet



the question has been often asked, why is the influence of ceaseless prayer, and of Christian effort, so feeble and inefficacious, compared to what it was in the early periods of Christianity? Why did light, in the infancy of the Church, spread so much more rapidly, and error, and superstition, sink away and wither under its blaze, so much more suddenly than at this day? We ought not, as a judicious writer has recently remarked, we ought not to ascribe it to less opposition in the system of false religions, or in the natural heart, nor that the secret of the success of the Gospel in the first century of the Christian Church, was owing so much to the spirit of prophecy, or the gift of miracles, as to the character and spirit of piety, which distinguished the Christians of that day, and which gave to them such a power with God, and such a mighty hold on the consciences of men. Is it not probable, 'for I am now speaking only of instrumental agency,' that the first disciples, driven by the peril of their condition to more caution, as well as more prayer, were able to do so much more, because it was done so much better. Was not their *discretion*, for they were 'wise as serpents,' better to them and to their cause than wealth or power? They moved upon the world in no wild or clashing schemes, in no broken or lingering efforts, but with a steady, heaven-taught, harmonious action. They had enemies whose eyes were upon them, and they knew it. For every step they took, they had a reason, for every measure a defence, for every error an apology. So that the mischief of their opposers returned 'upon their own heads, and their violent dealings came down upon their own pates.'

*Discretion*, has been denominated *practical wisdom*. It looks at the moral fitness of a thing, as well as the consequences which may follow from it. It determines according to its real propriety, as well as the ultimate advantage it may produce. It cannot exist in an *unenlightened mind*.

It is true there may be in some, a native shrewdness or intuition, far superior to what others possess, and which qualifies them with less acquired knowledge, to act discreetly. But no one can form a judicious opinion of the course he ought to pursue, or what objects deserve his chief attention, who does not know the probable results of the one, and the intrinsic worth of the other. To act wisely men must know themselves. ‘*Γνωθι σεαυτον*,’ we are told, is a maxim from Heaven. It is certainly as valuable a precept, as the wisdom of the sages ever produced. But it is one more easily remembered, than obeyed. ‘The mind, like the eye, sees all things rather than itself,’ and most are better informed, as to what is going on abroad, than at home. But if you are unacquainted with yourselves, unacquainted with human nature, in its different shades of character, and unacquainted with the grand and permanent principles of action among worldly men, you cannot be *discreet*. A traveller, if in an *unexplored* country, or when involved in the darkness of midnight, cannot save himself from taking a false step. He goes wrong not from rashness, but from ignorance. It is not enough to acquire knowledge from books. Here you may know how things *ought to be*



but by watching the developements of character among men, you will know how *things are*. In the errors and failures of others, you may learn how to correct your own.

The want of *knowledge* is not more fatal to discretion than the want of *discrimination*. In an *intellectual sense*, that young man is indiscreet, who collects truths and stores them away in his memory, as a farmer throws things into a lumber garret. A distinguished yet eccentric Statesman of our country, now dead, was a striking example of this kind. His conversations and speeches, were the out-pourings of a mind, profusely furnished; but where principles and facts, collected from the arts and sciences, from history and philosophy, from politics and theology, lay in one vast confusion, and resembled a forest over which a whirlwind had swept, or a shore on which had floated the wrecks of a thousand richly freighted ships.

How different the mind of Robert Hall. It was a cabinet, where every truth had its label, every fact its shelf, and he could place his hand upon them when needed. That old stale maxim, 'all is not gold that shines,' is nevertheless a golden maxim. We have no time nor intellect to waste on trifles. Books that merely amuse, but furnish no aliment to the mind, are not such as will satisfy one who aims at intellectual or moral eminence. They were made for mental drones, who love to loll under the shade of the tree, and care little whether it has fruit or not. It is this deficiency in intellectual discretion, that leads ardent minds to run after

new theories and new projects, as children after floating bubbles. They need only to be touched, to show their vanity; and yet unfortunately, things as well as men, sometimes put on the most captivating exterior, and glitter in all the colors of the rainbow, when most empty and worthless. In every plan of doing good, it is vastly important, that what is substantial and practicable should be separated from that which is visionary. There are many objects of charity, of tried worth, and of permanent utility; and the number is constantly increasing. If we conduct discreetly, we shall not throw our money, nor our influence, on every thing that comes along; as too many kind hearted people do, on every beggar that calls at their door; but we shall weigh the claims of every application, and decide not according to the ingenuity or eloquence of the agent, but according to the merits of the object. It is with our moral influence as it is with our money; if we expend it without *discretion*, we shall soon have none to spend. Goldsmith was always poor, when enjoying a princely patronage, because he lavished his income on every applicant, however unworthy.

Hence we perceive the necessity of *deliberation*, without which no one can be habitually discreet. ‘A rash mind will rush on where Angels fear to tread.’ The mariner who spreads his sails, regardless of wind or weather, chart or compass, is sure to shipwreck. Some have supposed that great decision of character, necessarily implied suddenness in its actings. This may be true, and yet its actings may be judicious. There is an



intuitive sagacity, in some great and daring minds, which seems at one glance to comprehend a subject, and foresee all the bearings of it on others. In a military aspect such minds were Cromwell's and Napoleon's. Yet neither of them were discreet men. They owed their success, in many instances, to that Providence, which selected them, as instruments to reform the Church, or scourge the world; rather than to the wisdom of their plan. A distinguished writer charges two prominent faults on Bonaparte: that of advancing without considering how he should retreat, and of seizing without considering how he should retain. His amazing achievements have been ascribed, 'to wearing his heart in his head;' for to him the wrong path if shortest, was the right path. But because some few have risen to fame, and have astonished the world with their exploits, who have been habitually indiscreet, we are no more to infer, that this is the mode of accomplishing most, than that the excesses of some, who with an iron constitution have outlived many a temperate man, is the sure way to prolong life. Few are beguiled into serious mistakes, who pause and weigh a matter thoroughly before they decide. Is the thing valuable? is it practicable? is it, all things considered, the best? will its attainment produce the greatest amount of good? Such inquiries will throw light upon the mind, and furnish it with motives, for the wisest and most successful action.

It appears to me that a certain degree of *independence*, in thought and in conduct, is a necessary part of *discretion*. 'In the multitude of counsellors there is safe-



ty,' but when these are injudicious, there is peril. In the *acquisition of knowledge*, we do well to follow it into every department of life, and not be ashamed of asking for information, of every class of men. This enabled Locke, you know, to amass such a vast fund of intelligence. But *discretion* is the *application of knowledge* to some particular emergency, and must form its own rule of conduct. A very wise man seldom asks advice. He throws himself upon his own resources, and with an intelligent discriminating and considerate mind, he is better able to determine, what is right or wrong, in relation to any question of interest or duty, than any one else. Spencer was relieved from embarrassment, when preaching before distinguished men, by reflecting that though inferior in knowledge on many other subjects, yet the particular one, on which he had prepared his discourse, was more familiar and better understood by himself, than it could be by any hearer. So it may be with us when we have to act on matters that deeply concern us. We revolve the subject in our own minds—we survey it in all its aspects—we have an interest in doing so, which none other can have. We weigh objections, and nothing prevents us from deciding correctly, but personal partiality or prejudice. Now go with this subject to a friend—admit he is judicious—you state the case; but you cannot as clearly as it stands before your own mind. He gives you his views, but they are *extemporaneous*. They may be discreet, but they may be such as he himself would reject upon reflection, or upon a fuller knowledge of the case. I do not dissuade you from

asking advice when perplexed. As young men, you can derive advantage from the experience of riper years, just as you could when on a journey in an unknown country, you apply to those who have travelled the same way, and are familiar with its dangers and its difficulties. But you must make the reflections of your own mind, the basis of your decision, and the opinions of others must be sought, that your decision may be as free as possible from error.

The *importance of Discretion* among the friends of truth and piety cannot but be deeply felt. It would do much to silence the malignant cavils of *infidelity*. There is infidelity at this day, masked and unmasked. It has grown up on a soil warmed with the brightest sunshine, and wet with the dew of Heaven, and infidelity on such ground, like henbane by the water courses, must be rank. It is natural, however unjust it may be, to associate a cause with the character of its agents. Not only ignorant, but intelligent minds will do it. It seems to be a kind of law of our nature, and to prevent its involving the religion of the Gospel in unmerited reproach, Christians are exhorted 'to walk circumspectly not as fools but as wise.' Now who can number the weapons, which the *indiscretions* of Zion's friends, have put into the hands of the enemy. Who can think, without a bleeding heart, of the abuse which Christianity has received, from the folly and rashness of some of her believers. How often have theories been started, to explain the 'secret things of God,' which have furnished sceptics, with some of their best arguments against the entire system of Divine Reve-



lation. How often have *doctrines* been broached, and pressed on the Churches with zeal, by ignorant, yet well meaning interpreters of the Bible, which disgust and grieve the more enlightened, and unsettle the faith of others in all religion. How often are heresies tolerated and encouraged in the bosom of the Church, which however well meant, are enough to degrade any cause, and produce in the delicate and fastidious mind, an utter loathing of a religion, which allows such fanaticism. I have said that an *unenlightened mind* cannot be discreet, and I ask, is it not from *ignorance*, that our holy and cherished faith, has been most frequently clothed with shame? A man may have little science, but much knowledge. Such a man was John Bunyan: but woe to the Church, when its standard of piety, is action without thought—zeal without knowledge: then we may expect to see insolence substituted for humility, rant for instruction, passion for principle, confusion for order; and when such a day comes over Zion, it will indeed be ‘a day of trouble and of rebuke and of blasphemy.’ We look around on our American Zion, on which God has poured the light of truth, as constant and as profusely as the light of day. We see our Churches enriched with knowledge, redundant in wealth, majestic in numbers and mighty in moral power. And we cannot refrain from the exclamation, alas that any of this knowledge should be perverted, that any of this wealth should be wasted, that any of the ‘sacramental host’ should be in collision, that any of their moral strength should be lost by *indiscretion*. Is there no voice that will hush the troubled waters? Is there no angel spirit that will cry from the

watch towers upon the warring household of the saints, the conflicting servants of God? 'Let there be no strife for *we* are Brethren.' Is the seamless garment of the Son of God to be rent in twain? Is blood to swim in the streets of our spiritual Jerusalem, not from the Romans without, but from the contests within? How long shall the master foe of God and man have gleams of hope, lighting up the darkness of despair, as he surveys the scenes around him? How long shall his bosom swell with pride, and his eye sparkle with malignant joy, and his tongue, 'set on fire of hell' utter its blasphemies over 'the bitterness and wrath and clamor and evil speaking,' which are heard in the tabernacles of the Saints? Is there no remedy? Yes, my young friends, there is a remedy. When a nation is put on the defensive, there is an end to *internal disunion*. When hostile myriads hang like a dark cloud around her coasts, every heart that beats with patriotism beats in concert.

The American Church has for years pressed the war upon the enemy in foreign lands. Her bloodless victories have received their lustre, not from the numbers she has *slain*, but from the numbers she has *saved*. Her sons have fallen in the front of the battle, but as each one was laid in his narrow bed, his companions could say, in a nobler sense than of the earthly warrior,

' Slowly and sadly we laid him down  
From the field of his fame, fresh and gory,  
We carved not a line, and we raised not a stone,  
But we left him alone with his glory.'

And we rejoice to believe, that this Institution, which is associated so closely with the triumphs of the cross on



the far distant territories of darkness, is yet to pour forth her hundreds, yea, thousands to bleed, and die and go home to rest from the fields of foreign service.

But, my young brethren, we have a great work to do at home. The enemy is coming in like a flood. We have the atheist who is trying to cover the sun with an everlasting eclipse, and

‘ Swing the earth all blind and blackening in the moonless air,  
And make man live by Watch fires.’

We have the Deist of every size and form and complexion, now curling his lip with unutterable contempt, as he catches a view of the banner of our faith, now walking proudly beneath it, asking no other boon than that one star should be erased—*the star of Bethlehem*. We have as many sects in the Church, as there were nations at Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost. Error in all the Protean shapes which it has ever assumed, seems to be starting up, and were it not the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, and that he has engraven the Church on the palms of his hands, and that her walls are continually before him we might despond. But there is a remedy. God will help her and that right early.

But let me repeat it, we have a work to do. Whilst I plead for discretion, that discretion which has intelligence and discrimination and deliberation and decision for its basis; I do not plead for that timidity, which we sometimes see in good men, and who from the fear of doing wrong, do little or nothing for the Church, I do not plead for that prudent charity, which to save some of its money from abuse, will keep the whole. I do

not ask for that excessive caution, which 'like a German Lexicographer will hunt through libraries to rectify a syllable.' But I do ask that principle and not passion should control you. I do call upon you, to look at future consequences, as well as at present effect in every decision you make, in every measure you adopt. I do entreat you to aim in all your literary pursuits, to acquire that knowledge which will do you and the Church, and the world most good. Your talents, constitute you the pride of your friends. Your acquisitions, the radiant stars, or the baleful meteors of the moral firmament. You will act on society, with an energy and effect, which it is both joyful and fearful to anticipate. It depends upon the principles which you imbibe, whether you will bless or curse the community, in which you dwell. It depends upon your *discretion* whether you will secure the confidence and affection of your fellow men, or squander the treasures and misapply the talents with which you are endowed. If virtuous and godly, your path will drop with fatness. A thousand hearts will feel your influence, and twice ten thousand will thank God that you had an existence. The ivy does not cling around the oak, nor find a more living and paternal support, than the young mind will cling to your character, and be refreshed by your example. Press onward in the path of science, of sobriety and of virtue. Let the woes of the world claim your compassion, and its moral ruin your prayers. Let your fame be the fame of Howard, your courage the courage of Luther, your spirit the spirit of Paul, and your glory the Cross of Christ.





